

On the trail of a secret war

On June 19, 1970, police in Beloit, Wisconsin, kicked in the door of a house in which Angus Mackenzie and his brother James were living, and in which they were putting out an antiwar monthly called *People's Dreadnaught*. Claiming to be looking for an awol army private, the police searched the premises. Although they found no private, nor anything else that might incriminate the Mackenzies, they continued to harass the brothers by, for example, stationing

COMMENT

plainclothesmen in the street outside their house. The Mackenzies believe that such tactics were largely responsible for a loss of revenue so severe that they were soon forced to fold their newspaper.

Reflecting angrily on what had occurred, and putting it together with stories he heard over the years about the harassment of other publications, Angus Mackenzie became obsessed with the idea that there had been a secret government campaign to stamp out the antiwar and countercultural press that sprang up during the Vietnam War. In 1978, with the help of a small grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, and with the encouragement of the *Review's* then-editor, James Boylan, he set out on a long search for evidence. Crisscrossing the United States and at times so hard up that he had to hitchhike, he combed through tens of

thousands of pages of government documents obtained by other journalists under the Freedom of Information Act. He also interviewed such former CIA, FBI, and Army counterintelligence people as he could persuade to talk to him. While he found no proof that the *People's Dreadnaught* had been the victim of anything more than local police animosity, he did find irrefutable evidence that agencies of the federal government had indeed done their best to put hundreds of other publications out of business. The story of that campaign is told, for the first time, in the article by Mr. Mackenzie that begins on page 57 of this issue.

We mention this not to blow our own horn, but to emphasize the debt of gratitude that the press owes Mr. Mackenzie for doing a job that news organizations, with their far greater resources, might well have undertaken on their own.

SABOTAGING THE DISSIDENT PRESS

COLUMBIA
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REVIEW
MARCH/APRIL 1981

The untold story of the secret offensive waged by the U.S. government against antiwar publications

by ANGUS MACKENZIE

The American public has learned in the last few years a great deal about the government's surveillance of the left during the Vietnam War era. The report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (the Church committee) first suggested how widely the government had been involved in planting informants inside New Left groups, propagating false information about these groups, and using a variety of tactics to disrupt their activities. That such tactics were also used on a vast scale against dissenting magazines and the underground press, however, has not been reported in a comprehensive way. The story has lain scattered in a hundred places. Now, documents obtained by editors and writers under the Freedom of Information Act, and interviews with former intelligence agents, make it possible, for the first time, to put together a coherent — though not necessarily complete — account of the federal government's systematic and sustained violation of the First Amendment during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The government's offensive against the underground press primarily involved three agencies — the CIA, the FBI, and the Army. In many cases, their

activities stemmed from what they could claim were legitimate concerns. The CIA's Operation CHAOS, for example, was set up to look into the foreign connections of domestic dissidents; however, it soon exceeded its mandate and became part of the broad attack on the left and on publications that were regarded as creating a climate disruptive of the war effort. At its height, the government's offensive may have affected more than 150 of the roughly 500 underground publications that became the nerve centers of the antiwar and countercultural movements.

A telling example of this offensive was the harassment of Liberation News Service, which, when opposition to the Vietnam War was building, played a key role in keeping the disparate parts of the antiwar movement informed. By 1968, the FBI had assigned three informants to penetrate the news service, while nine other informants regularly reported on it from the outside. Their reports were forwarded to the U.S. Army's Counterintelligence Branch, where an analyst kept tabs on LNS founders Ray Mungo and Marshall Bloom, and to the Secret Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the Navy, the Air Force, and the CIA. The FBI also attempted to discredit and break up the news service through various counterintelligence activities, such as trying to make LNS appear to be an FBI front, to create friction among staff members, and to burn down the LNS office in Washington while the staff slept upstairs. Before long, the CIA, too, joined the offensive; one of its recruits began filing reports on the movements of LNS staff members while reporting for the underground press to establish his cover as an underground journalist.

The CIA was apparently the first federal agency to plan actions against domestic publications. Its Operation CHAOS grew out of an investigation of *Ramparts* magazine, which during the

late 1960s was perhaps the leading national publication of the left. In early 1967, *Ramparts* was preparing to publish an exposé on the CIA's funding of the U.S. National Student Association and on various foundations the agency used as conduits for that funding. The CIA got wind of the article in January 1967, two months before the planned March publication date. Viewing the article as "an attack on CIA in particular and the administration in general," the agency started to monitor the activities of *Ramparts* editors, ostensibly to ascertain whether they had contacts with hostile intelligence services. The CIA's Directorate of Plans (its "dirty tricks" department) assigned to counterintelligence agent Richard Ober the task of "pulling together information on *Ramparts*, including any evidence of subversion [and] devising proposals for counteraction." While those proposals remain secret, several details relating to the *Ramparts* operation have become known.

On February 1, an associate of Ober's met with Thomas Terry, assistant to the commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, to request that the IRS review *Ramparts*' corporate tax returns to determine who the magazine's backers were. Terry agreed to do so. Subsequently, Ober's office provided the IRS with "detailed informant information" about *Ramparts* backers, whom the IRS was requested to investigate for possible tax violations. Ober's investigation of the magazine uncovered no "evidence of subversion" or ties to foreign intelligence agencies. By August, however, it had produced a computerized listing of several hundred Americans, about fifty of whom were the subject of detailed files.

In August, too, Ober's mandate was expanded as the CIA, responding to pressure from President Johnson, ini-

Angus Mackenzie is a free-lance writer in northern California. Editorial assistance was provided by Jay Peterzell of the Center for National Security Studies in Washington, which also provided research assistance. The article was financed in part by the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

tiated a massive and largely still-secret program of spying on and analyzing political protest — that is, Operation CHAOS. The underground press was one of its targets, the others being antiwar groups, radical youth organizations, black militants, and deserters and draft resisters. CHAOS, of course, raised special problems because it violated a clause in the agency's charter prohibiting the CIA from performing any "internal security function." To give a semblance of legality to the operation, the same justification was used as in the *Ramparts* investigation — namely, that the motive was to search out possible foreign funding or control.

In tracking the press, the CIA was able to count on help from the Army, with which, CHAOS files state, "Direct operational discussions on joint agent operations have been held." Ralph Stein directed the "New Left" desk for the Army's Counterintelligence Analysis Branch in Arlington, Virginia. The branch kept track of underground periodicals and maintained a microfilm crossfile on writers and editors affiliated with them. Stein got most of his information from public sources, but some of it came from classified intelligence reports which, he says, were provided by FBI and Army infiltrators. "Their information was too good, too inside," to have come from public source material, Stein recalled in a recent interview.

In late 1967, Stein was dispatched to CIA headquarters to brief liaison officer Jim Ludlum and others (presumably from Ober's office) on underground and student publications. He found, however, that the CIA men already knew a great deal about the subject. Two questions were foremost in their minds. They wanted to know all about "the ideas and beliefs of the individuals who produced these publications," Stein recalled, and about foreign financing of such prominent publications as *Ramparts* and a host of small underground papers. Stein's response to the latter question was, presumably, unsatisfactory. "Far from being financed by any hostile power abroad," he commented recently, "the people who were putting out these papers were actually using their lunch money, and we were able to prove this." After his briefing session at the CIA, Stein returned to his Arlington

office, where he remarked that he thought the CIA was not supposed to engage in domestic surveillance. Shortly thereafter, he was relieved of his liaison duties with the agency, which were taken over by a superior.

Like Stein, Ober found no evidence to support the suspicion that domestic dissidents were being financed or controlled by foreign powers. And, to Ober's credit, his office consistently reported that the antiwar and black nationalist movements were, in fact, re-

sponses to domestic political and economic frustrations. But the White House could not abandon what had by now become an *idée fixe* and — particularly after Richard Nixon's election in 1968 — it pushed the CIA to probe further into domestic politics. The collection of names continued apace. (By 1973, when CHAOS was converted into the CIA's International Terrorism Group, the computerized list of Americans that Ober had begun to compile in 1967 had grown to include 300,000 names.)

In May 1969, as surveillance activities increased, then-CIA director

Like many small antiwar papers, the Buffalo Town Crier was printed by a non-union shop. No sooner had its first issue hit the street in Buffalo, New York, than the FBI, not otherwise known as a friend of organized labor, laid plans to put the paper out of business by denouncing it anonymously to union leaders

SAC, Buffalo (100-19652)

1/29/69

Director, FBI (100-449698) *7/16*

REC-127

COINTELPRO - NEW LEFT

Reurlet 1/16/69.

The suggestion set forth in relet that you anonymously notify the local trade union leaders in the Buffalo area of the fact that the "Buffalo Town Crier" is being printed without union labor has merit and should be pursued further. Your letter states, however, that you plan to furnish this information anonymously to trade union leaders, especially those connected with the printing industry. It is felt that the organization most interested in this would be the printing unions and, therefore, your anonymous communication should be restricted to them. In this regard, you should furnish a copy of the paper to these unions with your anonymous letter.

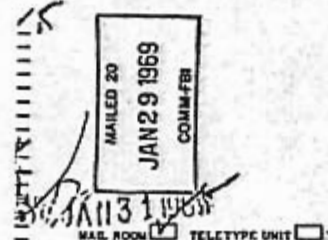
Assure that all steps necessary are taken to protect the Bureau as the source of these communications.

Advise of any results obtained.

RHH:jes
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NOTE:

By relet, BU advised that a New Left publication, "Buffalo Town Crier," was being printed without the use of union labor. Buffalo suggested that it might be possible to force this publication out of business by anonymously notifying trade union leaders of the fact that it was published without union labor. BU suggested that if the unions forced the newspaper to hire by union scale, the increased costs would prohibit its publication.



Richard Helms stated in a memo to field offices that "Operational priority of CHAOS activities in the field is in the highest category, ranking with Soviet and Chicom [Chinese Communist]." While the agency had formerly relied on FBI personnel, it now began recruiting outsiders for CHAOS undercover work. One such recruit was Sal Ferrera, mentioned in a December 27, 1977, *New York Times* article as having worked as a CIA operative in Washington, D.C., and Paris. The details of Ferrera's association with Operation CHAOS are reported here for the first time. They provide a glimpse into just how the CIA spied on the American press.

Ferrera grew up in Chicago, studied revolutionary theory at Loyola University, and in 1969 moved to Washington, D.C., where he made contact with local journalists writing for underground publications. He attended early meetings of the newly founded *Quicksilver Times*, which quickly became the city's leading crusader against the Vietnam War. When the first issue came out on June 16, 1969, Ferrera's name was on the masthead. He participated in editorial decisions and represented the paper at various functions, and he continued to work in the underground press at home and abroad until 1974.

At some point not yet known he also went to work for CHAOS, his underground press connections providing him with impeccable "radical credentials." Wherever there was radical activity, Ferrera seemed to be there. Between January and April 1970, he interviewed Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and other members of the Chicago Seven, as well as their lawyer, William Kunstler. In Washington, he became acquainted with Karl Hess, who worked for *The Libertarian* magazine, and soon took to dropping in to visit Hess's office in the basement of the Institute for Policy Studies, a center for antiwar activities.

During the 1971 May Day antiwar demonstration in Washington, Ferrera took photographs and reported on the event for College Press Service, an antiwar syndication service; he may well have been the agent mentioned in the Rockefeller Commission's hearings on the CIA as having covered the demonstration for the agency. He also appears to have been the source of two reports to

the CIA regarding staff members of Liberation News Service. In late April, when Ferrera was still working in the *Quicksilver* office, an LNS editor stopped in to ask if LNS staff members who planned to come down from New York for May Day could lodge there. A CHAOS informant's report, dated April 25 and released to LNS editor Andrew Marx under the FOIA, refers to this visit. A second report lists all LNS staff members who attended the May Day demonstration.

Ferrera subsequently went to live in Paris, where he wrote articles on radical student politics for LNS and College Press Service. In 1972, the CIA assigned Ferrera and another agent to monitor the activities of Philip Agee, who was then living in Paris and writing *Inside the Company*, his exposé of CIA operations in Latin America. Ferrera returned to the U.S. (and legally changed his name) in 1975, the year Agee's book appeared. When interviewed for this article, he denied his relationship with the CIA.

Ferrera's activities were not unique, as documents obtained by the Center for National Security Studies, a public-interest group based in Washington, D.C., make clear. In one memorandum a former CIA case officer for domestic CHAOS agents is quoted as saying that several such agents were active in this country "anywhere from months to years." Their activities belie the contention of the Church committee report, based on the claims of the CIA itself, that CHAOS agents operated in the U.S. primarily for training and cover purposes.

Four months after CHAOS was set up, the CIA initiated another domestic spying program. Run by the agency's Office of Security, it was dubbed Project Resistance — and it soon came up with a novel and quite effective means of shutting down dissident publications. Created in the wake of a program begun in February 1967 and designed narrowly to protect CIA recruiters on college campuses, Resistance soon became a nationwide probe of campus and non-campus dissident groups, paying special attention to the underground press. The Church committee report stated that

Project Resistance was "a broad effort to obtain general background for predicting violence, which might have created threats to CIA installations, recruiters or contractors. . . ." Files obtained by the Center for National Security Studies, however, make it clear that Project Resistance's main purpose was to infiltrate the underground press, and that it did so routinely, sometimes through local police informers.

In late 1968, a Resistance analyst filed the following memo:

A modern phenomenon which has evolved in the last three or four years is the vast growth of the Underground Press. Underground means of mass communication utilized to avoid suppression by legal authority and/or attribution is not new to this age, but its volume is and the apparent freedom and ease in which filth, slanderous and libelous statements, and what appear to be almost treasonous anti-establishment propaganda is allowed to circulate is difficult to rationalize.

Then he suggested a novel strategy for silencing such "anti-establishment propaganda." The underground papers, he wrote, "are not a quality press. Eight out of 10 would fail if a few phonograph record companies stopped advertising in them." Since Resistance, like CHAOS, was nominally a spy operation, and since, again nominally, the CIA was prohibited from performing any "internal security function," the CIA did not itself feel comfortable carrying out such a program. The FBI, however, felt no such inhibitions.

In January 1969, four months after the Resistance agent had filed his memo on the underground press, the FBI's San Francisco office wrote to headquarters in Washington and to the FBI's New York office, asserting that financial "assistance" from Columbia Records — i.e., advertisements in the *Berkeley Barb* and other underground papers — "appears to be giving active aid and comfort to enemies of the United States." The San Francisco office suggested that the FBI should use its contacts to persuade Columbia Records to stop advertising in the underground press.

One of the first publications to feel the effect of this strategy was the *Free Press*, an alternative paper in Washington, D.C. Its February 1 issue was the last to carry Columbia record ads, a vital source of revenue. By the end of the

year the paper was dead. In Wisconsin, the six-paper Kaleidoscope underground chain, created for the express purpose of obtaining ads from New York record companies, also succumbed. In a recent interview, Marc Knops, the editor of the *Madison Kaleidoscope*, which survived briefly on local ads, said that when the record companies pulled out, "The bottom fell out of the ad market. By autumn 1969 there was no income. Kaleidoscope was gone as a functioning chain." (In 1970 the former chain's Milwaukee paper, also surviving on local ads, was

the target of another effort by the FBI's local office, which attempted — but failed — to use "public exposure" to gain the dismissal of two professors who frequently contributed to the underground paper. Similar, more successful efforts were directed against professors at the University of South Alabama who had contributed to the radical *Rearguard*.)

Deprived of most of its record ads, the *Berkeley Barb* survived on lewd sex ads. At the *Barb*, as elsewhere, editors and staff had no clear indication of why

a major source of revenue had suddenly evaporated. Columbia Records has declined to comment.

Throughout the country, other FBI offices employed similar tactics to silence the dissident press. When headquarters ordered the Detroit office to "neutralize" the *South End* and the *State News*, the student papers at Wayne State and Michigan State universities respectively, the office sent anonymous letters of protest to local businesses that advertised in them. A more limited campaign was waged against *The Tech*, the student paper at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Another bureau ploy used against college papers consisted of anonymously mailing their most controversial articles to funding sources and other influential persons, including state legislators, college trustees, and "friendly news media." "Items submitted should be extremely radical on their face, use profanity or be repulsive in nature," J. Edgar Hoover stated in a directive to fourteen field offices in May 1968.

The FBI also enlisted the assistance of local banks. In Cincinnati, the branch office obtained transaction records for two underground papers, the *Independent Eye* and the *Queen City Express*, helping it to identify advertisers and contributors. "As information is gathered," a memo dated July 8, 1970 stated, "it is believed there will be opportunities to suggest counterintelligence action against individuals and groups who are giving financial support to these publications."

Showing initiative, in 1970 the El Paso office proposed a "possible counterintelligent [sic] action" designed to silence the editor of the underground *The Sea Turtle and the Shark*; the idea was to publicize his alleged past criminal activities and "dependence upon various welfare programs." Eventually the editor was arrested for selling an "obscene newspaper" to a minor after the FBI had supplied information to local authorities.

In addition to these comparatively restrained strategies, the FBI also instigated violent acts. In San Diego, for instance, the paramilitary Secret Army Organization, led by FBI informant

In this 1968 letter, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover authorized the Bureau's Detroit office to go after *South End*, the student paper at Wayne State University. The plan: send anonymous letters — e.g., from "a concerned parent" — urging state officials to cut off the paper's funding. He also suggested leaning on *South End*'s advertisers

SAC, Detroit (157-3214)

Director, FBI (100-440066) - 35 /

11/19/68

1 - Mr. C. J. [redacted]
1 - [redacted]
1 - [redacted]

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM
BLACK NATIONALIST - HATE GROUPS
RACIAL INTELLIGENCE

Reurlet 10/29/68.

Authority is granted to mail the anonymous letters set out in relet. Take the usual precautions to insure this mailing cannot be traced to the Bureau. Advise the Bureau of any results.

As a further technique in this matter Detroit should submit a recommendation to alert appropriate advertisers in the "South End" to the extremist nature of this newspaper.

TJD:lan
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NOTE:

The [redacted] is the student newspaper at Wayne State University. It is supported by school funds and this is a state-supported university. This newspaper has a black extremist viewpoint and is self-described as "revolutionary." It is sympathetic to the Black Panther Party, and carries as its slogan: "The year of the heroic guerrilla." We previously alerted a publication to the nature of this newspaper. Now a Detroit newspaper has published an expose of the "South End" and it is appropriate to send the anonymous letters being approved. These are supposedly from a concerned parent and a concerned student and will be directed to state and university authorities responsible for funding this newspaper, including Governor Romney of Michigan.

A letter is also being sent to the Archbishop of Detroit concerning a Catholic group funding W.E.B. Du Bois Institute of Black Studies. This letter points out the Communist nature of the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs of America and the revolutionary nature of this institute. Since these letters are anonymous there is no possibility of embarrassment to the Bureau and they may help cut off funds being used for black extremist propaganda.

25 1968 TELETYPE UNIT ☐

Howard Godfrey, assaulted the offices and staff of the *Street Journal* on December 25, 1969. By January of 1971, the commune that published the *Journal* had broken up. FBI documents released under the FOIA show for the first time that the Secret Army Organization's operations extended as far east as Wisconsin, where the organization threatened to kidnap Mike Fellner, editor of the radical Madison paper *Takeover*.

In some cities, when direct attacks proved unsuccessful, the government set up its own phony news service which, so long as it was unexposed, provided a means of penetrating the left; once exposed, it cast suspicion on legitimate underground reporters and helped to create a feeling of paranoia. The Army started *Midwest News* in Chicago, according to former intelligence officer

Ralph Stein; in San Francisco, the FBI set up Pacific International News Service. The head of the FBI's San Francisco office at the time, Charles Bates — he is now a reporter for KGO-TV in San Francisco — said recently that he did not specifically recall Pacific International, but added that front operations of that kind "would have been fine if it weren't put down in writing." A spokesman for the San Francisco field office refused to confirm or deny the bureau's use of the news service. Meanwhile, on the East Coast, the FBI operated New York Press Service under the direction of Louis Salzberg. NYPS offered its services to left-wing publications at attractive rates, soliciting business with a letter that read, in part: "The next time your organization schedules a demonstration, march, picket or office party, let us know in advance. We'll

cover it like a blanket and deliver a cost free sample of our work to your office." NYPS's cover was blown when Salzberg surfaced as a government witness in the Chicago Seven trial, during which it was disclosed that he had been an FBI informant.

The New York field office shrewdly turned this setback into a means of casting suspicion on Liberation News Service. The office prepared an anonymous letter, copies of which were sent to newspapers and antiwar groups, accusing LNS of being an FBI front. "Lns [sic] is in an ideal position to infiltrate the movement at every level," the letter stated. "It has carefully concealed its books from all but a select few. Former employees have openly questioned its sources of operating funds. I shall write to you further on Lns for I (and several others) are taking steps to expose this fraud for what it really is — a government financed front."

Fiefdoms of information

In my two-year-long effort to obtain federal agency files on underground publications, I learned almost as much about how the Freedom of Information Act works — or doesn't work — as I did about the means by which the government sought to suppress dissent in the 1960s and 1970s. I found, above all, that while some agencies were quite cooperative, the CIA and FBI proved adept at keeping their information to themselves.

In requesting FBI counterintelligence files and the entire "New Left Publications" file under the FOIA, I was able to supply the bureau with seventy-eight file numbers relating to forty-seven periodicals (obtained from heavily censored files previously released to editors of publications that no longer exist). Since the most difficult element in any request is identifying documents specifically enough so that the agency can locate them, this should have facilitated a quick response. Instead, the FBI demanded an advance deposit of \$1,100 for more than 1,100 hours of search time. My appeal of that payment is still pending.

In the case of the CIA, I was able to supply the agency with four file numbers. After twenty-six days a letter came stating that I would have to agree to unspecified search fees. Nothing then happened until

fourteen months later, when a second letter said I would have to deposit \$30,000 on a search they estimated would cost a total of \$61,501.

The Secret Service, by contrast, waived search-and-copy fees and complied with my request within seventeen days, sending forty censored pages dealing with nineteen newspapers — even though I had been unable to supply any file numbers to the service. Likewise, the Department of Defense attempted to comply with the intent of the act, although, again, I was unable to supply file numbers. Within thirty-two days of my request, the department waived \$445.50 in search-and-copy fees. After a search, its Defense Investigative Service determined that it might have records on seventeen of the 500 newspapers on my list.

Supposedly, new teeth were put in the FOIA in 1974. At the time, a House-Senate conference report said that agencies must comply with requests within thirty days, that "fees should not be used for the purpose of discouraging requests," and that withheld files must concern activity within the agency's legal authority. My experience shows that the CIA and the FBI refuse to comply with both the intent and letter of the amended act. A.M.

Such, then, were the techniques used by the U.S. government to stifle freedom of expression in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These and other violations of American civil liberties, as publicized in the Church committee report, together with the public revulsion that attended its publication, resulted in restrictions on domestic surveillance by the CIA and FBI. Now the removal of those safeguards seems a distinct possibility, at least to judge by the recent report on intelligence issued by the Heritage Foundation and embraced by the Reagan transition team. That report claims that "The threat to the internal security of the Republic is greater today than at any time since World War II" and recommends resurrecting the standing internal security committees in Congress and, once again, permitting the FBI and CIA to spy on dissidents, including journalists.

If Reagan officials do go ahead and propose such measures, they will undoubtedly argue that guarantees can be established to prevent surveillance from getting out of hand. But if the experience of the Johnson and Nixon years is any guide, even programs which begin quite modestly can expand far beyond their original mandate.